

(Milwaukee)— Congresswoman Gwen Moore, Senator Herb Kohl and Brookings Institution economist John Austin joined Wisconsin governmental, science, labor, and environmental leaders today to call on the U.S. Congress to fund Great Lakes restoration and economic recovery.

“Since I was sworn in to the United States House of Representatives, I have treated Lake Michigan as one of my most important constituents,” Congresswoman Moore said. “But, my support for the restoration and protection of our water resources dates back to my days in the Wisconsin legislature, and I have continued to outspokenly advocate for Great Lake’s funding from my seat in Congress. I want to see this President’s agenda for the Great Lakes fulfilled.”

“From the efforts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiatives we will see a resurgence in our economy. We will witness the emergence of green jobs for the 21st Century, the maintenance of our beaches, water quality improvements, and growth in businesses centered on water. The key is swift action now, before problems get worse.”

This issue has recently gained momentum in Congress and in the White House recently, as President Obama included a \$475 million Great Lakes restoration initiative in his fiscal year 2010 budget. These funds passed the House of Representatives in the Interior Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2010 but still need to be cleared by the Senate.

The Brookings Institution estimates that the Great Lakes region would see a \$2 economic benefit from every \$1 investment in restoration of the Great Lakes. The Milwaukee Metropolitan area alone has the potential to realize \$1.5 to \$2.3 billion in economic gains.

The \$475 million Great Lakes restoration initiative invests in priorities such as toxic pollution clean-up and restoration of wildlife habitats. As the source of more than 90% of the nation’s fresh surface water, the Great Lakes are seriously threatened by problems including sewage contamination, invasive species, toxic pollution and the loss of wetlands and other habitat. When the Great Lakes are endangered, it is a drain on the economy and job opportunities in the region are diminished.

Milwaukee's Mayor Tom Barrett said, "This event is helping to raise awareness of the importance of restoring the Great Lakes. Restoration funds proposed by President Obama will not only improve water quality but will stimulate the economy of the Great Lakes region."

"Great Lakes restoration is a good investment for the economy and the environment," said John Austin, Senior Fellow for the Brookings Institution. "We can restore the lakes and boost the economy of the region by fully funding solutions that tackle the most pressing problems to the Great Lakes and the businesses and communities which depend on them."

"Great Lakes restoration and economic recovery are directly connected," said Paul Zimmer, LiUNA. "We are urging Congress to stand up for the millions of people who depend on the Great Lakes for their jobs, drinking water, public health, and way of life by fully funding the \$475 million Great Lakes restoration initiative. We must take action on issues like cleaning up toxic sediments, repairing our aging infrastructure, and preventing polluted runoff now before the cost to fix these problems skyrockets."

"Congressional action to fully fund Great Lakes restoration initiative will be a huge step forward in the effort to restore the nation's largest supply of surface fresh water," said Shahla Werner, PhD, Director of the Sierra Club's John Muir Chapter. "Restoring the Great Lakes is the right thing to do for the environment and the economy."

"Great Lakes restoration is a good investment for the economy and the environment," said Senator Kohl. "We can restore the lakes and boost the economy of the region by fully funding solutions that tackle the most pressing problems of the Great Lakes and the businesses and communities which depend on them."

The call for Congressional action comes on the heels of EPA public comment sessions around the Great Lakes region. The agency is gathering feedback from the public on how future Great Lakes restoration funds should be spent.

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